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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REPORT ON THE GREAT ALASKA EARTHQUAKE OF 1964: ENGINEERING

In the last issue of BSSA, there appeared a book review of the report: *The Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964: Engineering*, published by the National Academy of Sciences. The reviewer commented that it was unfortunate that the volume was not published shortly after the earthquake instead of 9 years later. As chairman of the engineering panel that prepared the report, I should like to reply to this comment; not to defend the late appearance of the volume, but to call attention to the source of the difficulty so that future earthquake reports may avoid it. Although there is always a tendency for the authors of papers for such reports to postpone writing in order to make further studies, the papers in the Engineering volume were essentially complete 5 years ago. The delay was a consequence of NAS having decided to prepare and publish a comprehensive report on the Alaska earthquake, of which the Engineering volume was only one of eight, and to do this in the standard way, with standard editorial procedure, and adhering to the high NAS standards. A smallish report on an earthquake can profit from a well-coordinated project of inspection, writing, and publication, in that there is good intercommunication, duplications are avoided, consistency can be achieved, etc. It is clear now that a closely coordinated effort can cause unacceptable delay in publishing a large report on a major earthquake. It would be my recommendation that future major earthquake investigations and reports be subdivided into essentially independently funded segments, such as Seismology, Geology, Engineering, Sociology, etc., with only moderate attention paid to consistency, duplication, etc.; and the reports should be published independently. I think there would also be an advantage in subdividing the engineering investigation and report into three relatively independent segments dealing, respectively, with engineering design and practice, earthquake engineering research, and socio-economic impact. The advantages of doing this would be more complete coverage of the event, and quicker publication. The disadvantages would be less consistency, possibly some duplication, and perhaps differences in published format; however, the disadvantages would be outweighed by the advantages. The eight volumes of The Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964, taking 13 in of shelf space and weighing 30 pounds, provide a massive collection of information that will be of great use; it is certainly the most impressive earthquake report ever published. It could have been better, of course; but, then, the perfect earthquake report has never been written and never will be. However, this should not deter us from trying to do better next time.

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